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East Timor - Conditions for Progress

-David Scott

A year ago who could have imagined the remarkable events that have occurred in the past year.... Bishop Belo and, surprisingly, Jose Ramos-Horta Nobel Peace Prize laureates. President Clinton and Republican leader Gingrich publicly call for an East Timor settlement, the European Union urge a just settlement, the new British Foreign Minister announce Britain's support for Portuguese efforts to find a settlement on East Timor, Indonesia and Malaysia embarrassed by the ban on the Kuala Lumpur conference, Australia fail in its attempt to be elected to the Security Council largely because of its support for Indonesia, the Pope reaffirm his concern for the freedom of the people of East Timor and the new Secretary-General of the UN make a commitment to find a solution to the East Timor injustice.

But this is not all. In a *Far Eastern Economic Review* survey of Asian business executives 64% said Jakarta should allow East Timor to secede from Indonesia. Without the Indonesians in the sample, support would have been 80%. Seventy six per cent Australian businessmen expressed support for secession.

A few days later Dr Amien Rais leader of the 28 million strong Muslim organisation Muhammadiyah said East Timor should be allowed to become independent if that was the wish of the people.[1] Muhammadiyah has more than 110,000 schools, 114 universities and many hospitals and welfare organisations across Indonesia. Dr Rais is also a prominent member of the Indonesian Association of Islamic Intellectuals (ICMI). Abdurrahman Wahid, leader of the even larger Muslim organisation Nahdhatul Ulama, has been a long time advocate of a settlement for East Timor.

The credit side of the balance sheet for 1996-97 would also show a strengthening of opposition within East Timor to Indonesian rule with courageous demonstrations and heightened guerrilla activities which evoked brutal reprisals by Indonesian troops; increased unity among East Timorese outside East Timor; stronger networks around the world; the impressive skills of East Timorese in key positions in CNRM; the Nobel recognition of twenty years of skilled diplomacy by Jose Ramos-Horta and expansion of

[1] *The Australian*, 11 December 1996

common ground shared by all the East Timorese participating in the UN sponsored All-Inclusive Dialogues.

All this has been achieved without hostage takings, hi-jacking airlines or terrorist activities, and until the actions near Bacau in early June of which we still know very little, without the loss of civilian lives. This, alongside Xanana's Mandela-like commitment to respect of the rights of non-east Timorese in East Timor and desire for East Timor to live peacefully alongside Indonesia, has given the cause huge moral and political credit.

On the negative side East Timor is still an occupied country with 15,000 troops in East Timor using extreme violence to quash dissent and as I was confirmed to me in a in a brief visit in June last year, Indonesia is still trying to undermine morale by recruiting young, unemployed East Timorese, converting them to Islam and sending them back to East Timor to provoke incidents that will spark Moslem antagonism throughout Indonesia in an attempt to alienate the Islamic bodies that support self-determination or autonomy for East Timor.

In Jakarta, President Suharto, nominally reinforced by the recent stage managed elections remains stubbornly resistant to change and those in the Army who see sense in loosening the grip on East Timor have little influence. Last year I asked some influential Indonesians in Jakarta how it was the Army could not learn from what had happened in the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea and Taiwan. At a certain stage of economic development and education in those countries, people rebelled at dictatorial Army rule and inevitably this must occur in Indonesia.

The reply was that was even the younger Army men have little imagination or political sensitivity. A 'tunnel vision' leads them to believe their mission is to hold the Republic together in the only way that they know.....by the use of force.

In reality, with the exception of East Timor and Irian Jaya, strong national consciousness and pride in achievement throughout Indonesia is strong enough to contain dissent in Aceh and in the longer term there is no doubt that democratic reforms and decentralisation of government are more likely to hold the nation together than oppressive Army rule.

When the President and Army are obliged to relax their iron grip, Indonesia has the infrastructure of democracy which includes a parliament, law courts, the rule of law, political parties and the earlier experience of democracy to put into effect to achieve more democratic, negotiating governance.

East Timor Impasse

On the issue of East Timor there is an impasse. On the one hand unprecedented international support. It is motivated by a variety of motives...concern for human rights abuses and the plight of the East Timorese people, a recognition that East Timor is the last victim of the Cold War not to have its rights restored and a wish to remove an embarrassment from relations between Indonesia and the nations with which it has close economic and diplomatic ties. There is also a much stronger resistance within and outside East Timor. On the other hand an ageing President with dictatorial powers remains stubbornly opposed to making even the simple concessions that would win international acclaim,

This impasse will only be broken by a third party.... a government, say Norway or the US or the EU, an agency or individual that could quietly broker at least an agreement to talk which later might be moved under the auspices of the UN which is committed to achieving a 'a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement'.

Conditions for Mediation

A mediator will have three conditions. The first is that the East Timor resistance be clear about its irreducible objectives and the stages it would accept in meeting them, especially the degree of autonomy that would be acceptable initially. This is a matter for Xanana Gusmao, Ramos-Horta, Konis Santana and other East Timorese independence leaders.

The second requirement is an assurance that differences among East Timorese interest groups are no greater than in any normal movement and can be contained within democratic process.

This requirement is highlighted, and I believe greatly exaggerated, in an article in the *Washington Post* after the Nobel awards, by Robert Barry, US Ambassador to Indonesia 1992-1995 [2]. Barry believes the international community should encourage a settlement in East Timor but says it will need to be an evolutionary solution of gradually increasing autonomy 'rather than precipitating a new Bosnia on the world scene'.

He wrote that his visits to East Timor led him to believe that the divisions that existed in East Timor before the Indonesian invasion remain strong and at the present time an international peace keeping force would be needed to maintain order in the event of an Indonesian withdrawal.

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2 *Washington Post*, 31 October 1996

... disagreed observer, it seems to me Barry's view is a gross exaggeration of differences within the East Timorese community especially in relation to resistance to Indonesian rule, support for Xanana and CNRM and self-determination.

Differences exist in all communities and independence movements and in the case of East Timor they have been exploited by Indonesia's publicly stated policy of attempting to set East Timorese against East Timorese within the East Timorese community.

However the critical point is that if Ambassador Barry believes there are serious differences so does the State Department and so do the foreign affairs departments of other nations that would also support a settlement.
(The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs continues to echo the Indonesian line and to denigrate Ramos-Horta even after the Nobel peace award.)

This critical problem of real and perceived unity can only be addressed by the East Timorese people in their various organisations. In all organisations there are legitimate differences of opinion about objectives and process. Areas where there are disagreement need to be clarified. In the case of East Timor it seems to me the differences that separate UDT and Fretilin relate to the events, animosities and mistakes of more than twenty years ago. If so it would make good sense to disband and leave the way open for new parties when it is possible for the people of East Timor at home and abroad to form a democratic voting constituency.

At this critical moment unity around Xanana, CNRM and the common purpose of achieving negotiations for a phased peace plan must be demonstrated unequivocally. Peace must not be delayed a day because of events and political mistakes of the past as Falintil squad leader David Alex eloquently pleaded in the Portuguese documentary.

The third requirement a mediator would insist on is that the self determination movement demonstrates it has the ability to manage effectively whatever administrative responsibility might be devolved to it in a staged processes of devolution and transfer of authority that would be inevitable in any peace plan. Everyone must realise that without this there will be no negotiation. 'We will not be backing basket cases', a senior US diplomat said last year.

It would in fact be unreasonable to expect any country or agency to support a movement, even if it is united, if it does not have the organisational competency which must be a necessary condition for full diplomatic support.

The experience of other successful independence movements shows this to be so. Nelson Mandela's moving autobiography, *The Long Walk To Freedom* describes how the South African National Party went about satisfying itself as to Mandela's credentials, the degree of unity in the ANC and their credibility to deliver on undertakings they might make.

The remarkable success of the 30 year long independence struggles in Namibia, South West Africa, Eritrea, Tigray and Ethiopia depended to a much greater extent on armed resistance than in East Timor but the armed resistance was backed by a shared purpose, commitment, clear views about the society for which they were fighting, tight, efficient organisation and major sacrifices by the people in the diaspora.

The expatriates of these countries contributed enormous financial and moral support and acquired the skills that would be needed when they could govern their own affairs. It was this that gave confidence to the UN and the nations that brokered agreements for these new nations or changed societies after the Cold War.

Implementation

What process is needed to ensure that members of the Timorese community are able to contribute to developing policies and what issues must be addressed?

ETRA (East Timor Relief Association) established in Australia and headed by Agio Pereira, has prepared what I believe to be an excellent proposal for establishing a 'Think Tank' that would use networks for the circulation and consideration of policy papers prepared by East Timorese and outside experts on a wide range of topics.

It is proposed that 'The Think Tank' would be jointly sponsored by ACFOA (Australian Council for Overseas Aid) and CAA (Community Aid Abroad). Both organisations have been committed supporters of East Timor since 1975. Their association would emphasis the independence of the 'Think Tank' as well as providing resource material and links to other helpful organisations and individuals. An important value of the 'The Think Tank' is that it will strengthen unity by giving people tasks to work on together.

Topics would include the staged transfer of power; internal security; criminal codes; law enforcement; citizenship; economic self-sufficiency; language policy; the role of women; education and health policy; employment and industry policy; agricultural and fisheries development; status of Indonesian owned companies, oil and gas resources and foreign treaties.

It is particularly important that the work that is being carried out by Justino Guterres and others on the cultural heritage, or heritages, of East Timor be expanded. As anthropologist Elizabeth Traube has pointed out, it is critically important for rulers, democratic or otherwise, to ubderstand and have a high regard for traditions and traditional authorities.[3]

Nationalism evolves from understanding and mutual appriciation of the various cultures that make up a nation. This is especially true of the multi-lingual, multi-cultural nation of East Timor. I am sure work on religion, art, music, language, family structure and exchange systems will be encouraged through the 'Think Tank'.

Some work on government an policies has already been done by, for example, the Self-Training Initiative for Democracy in Portugal and 'The East Timor Project' publication of essays on the political economy of East Timor'.[4] There is also the proceedings of the 1995 conference in Melbourne, *It's Time To Lead The Way* organised under ETRA auspice. Geoffrey Hull's paper 'A Language Policy for East Timor' is a good example of the kind of working papers needed to initiate informed debate. The Think Tank will establish a Documentation Centre and a register of East Timorese and others qualified to assist with the preparation of material.

Priority should be given to topics immediately relevant and helpful to Jose Ramos-Horta and the diplomatic campaign and to show Indonesia that East Timor is not a threat to their security and has sensible policies. These might include political ideology, foreign relations, attitudes towards Indonesia, land policy and the status of non-east Timorese settlers.

Constitution

Fundamental constitutional questions are critically important. They include the nature of government in East Timor, the Assembly or Parliament, the role of a head of state, human rights, the rule of law, the place of the Army and Church, franchise and the frequency and method of election of representatives.

I am sure East Timor's leaders have already given consideration to these matters. Establishing a small Constitutional Commission to develop options might be a useful way of proceeding rather than initiating discussion on complex legal matters through the

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[3] Traube, Elixabeth. 'Colonialism and Decolonisation', in *East Timor At The Crossroads*, Edited by Peter Carey and G. Carter Bentley, Cassell, 1996.

[4] The East Timor Project, Volume 1, Centre for South East East Asian Studies, Northern Territory University 1995.